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DANIEL GETE

Stitched

TERROR



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INTENSE **#3**

Stitched TERROR



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pages 39 - 48
JONATAS

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Gore
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RENATO CAMILO
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RENATO CAMILO

page 8
JONATAS

HORRIFIED COVERS

DANIEL GETE
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Horried Dread
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Horried Century

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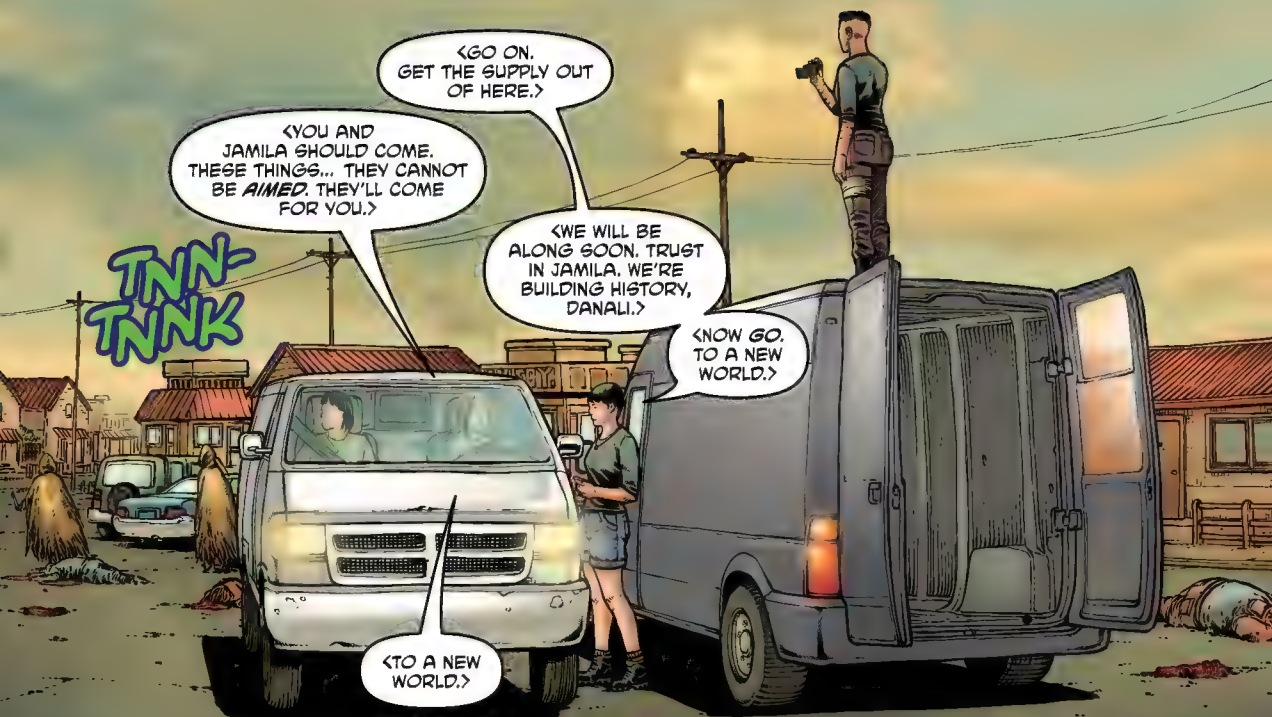
Stitched



STITCHED

THE STITCHED ARE AN ANCIENT, UNDEAD EVIL. A CURSED BLACK LIQUID FILLS THE MORTAL SHELLS THAT HAVE HAD ALL OPENINGS SEWN SHUT, TAKING THEIR LIFE AND MUMMIFYING THEIR BODY. THEY THEN RESPOND TO ONLY ONE THING, THE SOUND OF ROCKS IN A CAN, AND THAT SETS THEM ON AN INDISCRIMINATE KILLING RAMPAGE. THEY FEEL NO PAIN. THEY CAN LOSE LIMBS, BE SHOT, BURNED, AND CRUSHED. ALL TO NO AVAIL, THEY WILL NOT STOP UNTIL THE SOUND THAT DRIVES THEM CEASES.





<YOU AND JAMILA SHOULD COME. THESE THINGS... THEY CANNOT BE *AIMED*. THEY'LL COME FOR YOU.>

<GO ON. GET THE SUPPLY OUT OF HERE.>

<WE WILL BE ALONG SOON. TRUST IN JAMILA. WE'RE BUILDING HISTORY, DANALI.>

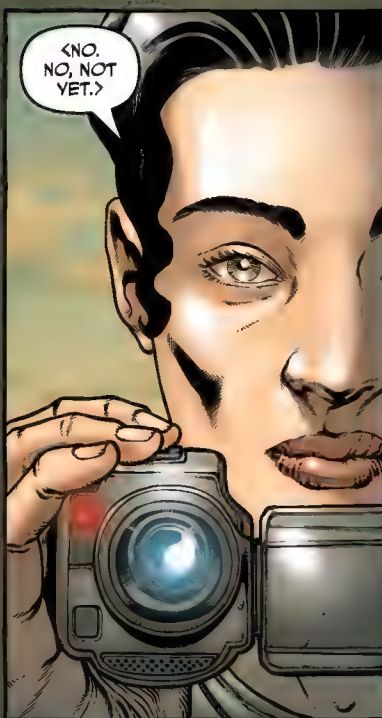
<NOW GO. TO A NEW WORLD.>

<TO A NEW WORLD.>

TNN-
TNNK



<IS THAT ENOUGH FOOTAGE, JAMILA??>

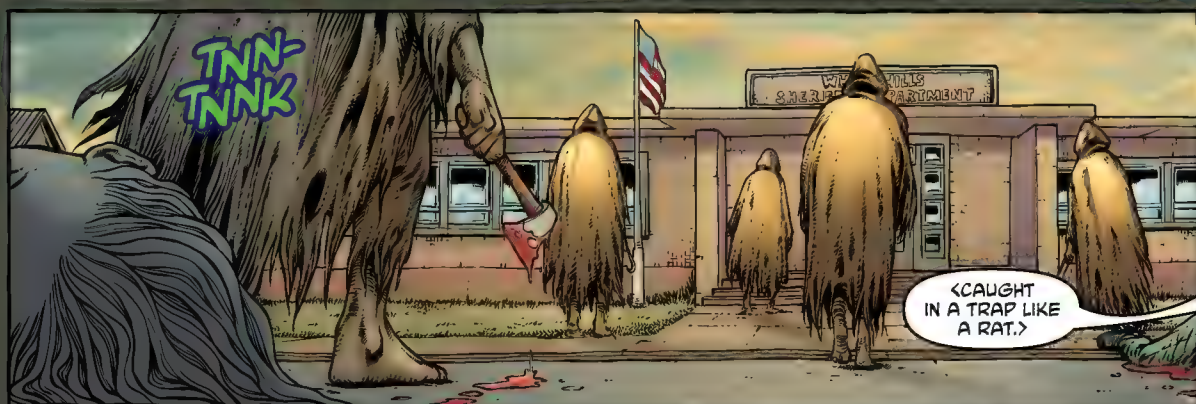


<NO. NO, NOT YET.>



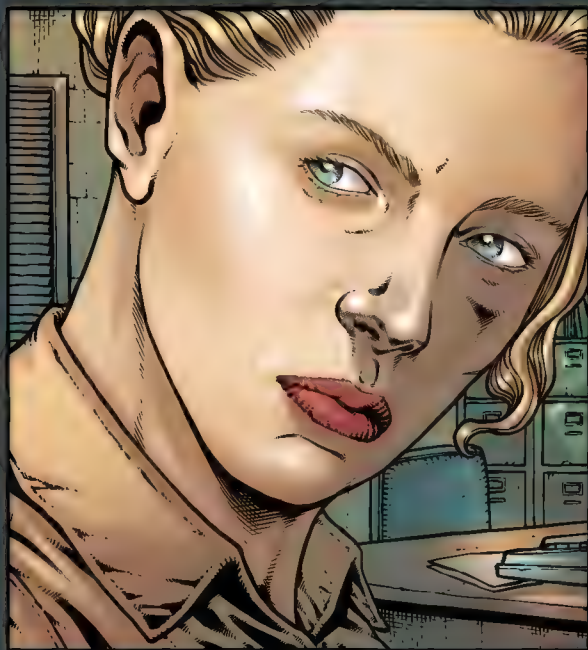
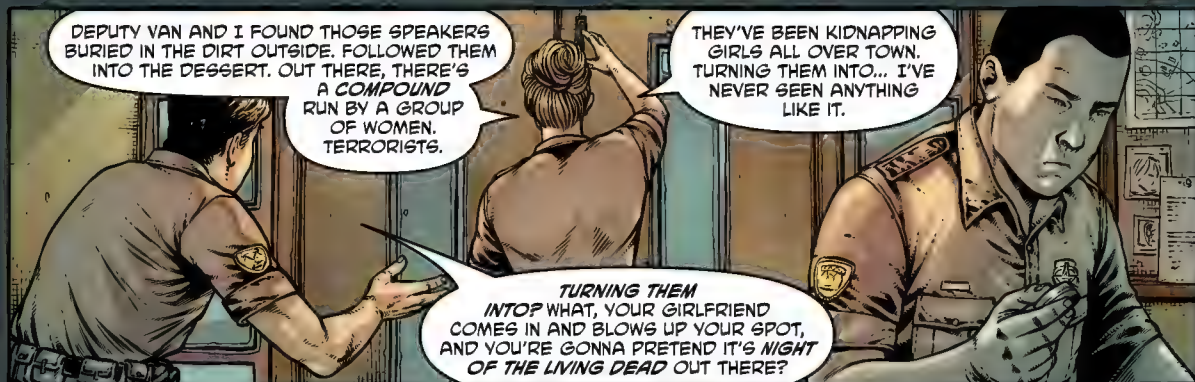
<I WANT TO SEE IF *SHE* IS IN THERE.>

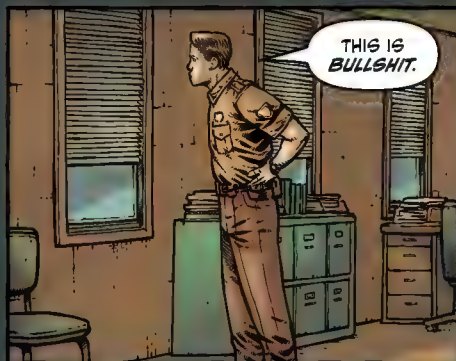
TNN-
TNNK



<CAUGHT IN A TRAP LIKE A RAT.>

TNN-
TNNK





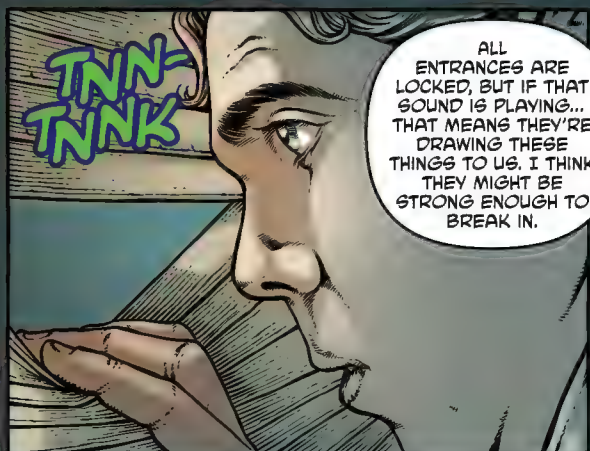
THIS IS
BULLSHIT.



SHERIFF...
YOU SAID DEPUTY VAN
WENT WITH YOU.

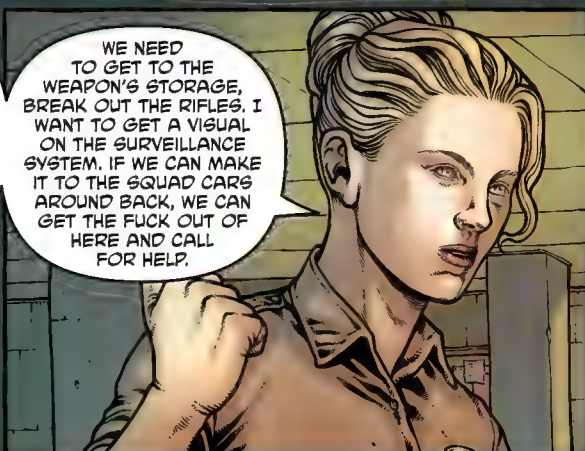
HE DIDN'T
MAKE IT. I'M
SORRY.

I BARELY
MADE IT OUT MYSELF. I DON'T
KNOW WHO THESE PEOPLE ARE
OR WHAT THEY'RE DOING HERE,
BUT WE CAN'T FIGHT THEM.



ALL
ENTRANCES ARE
LOCKED, BUT IF THAT
SOUND IS PLAYING...
THAT MEANS THEY'RE
DRAWING THESE
THINGS TO US. I THINK
THEY MIGHT BE
STRONG ENOUGH TO
BREAK IN.

TNN-
TNKK

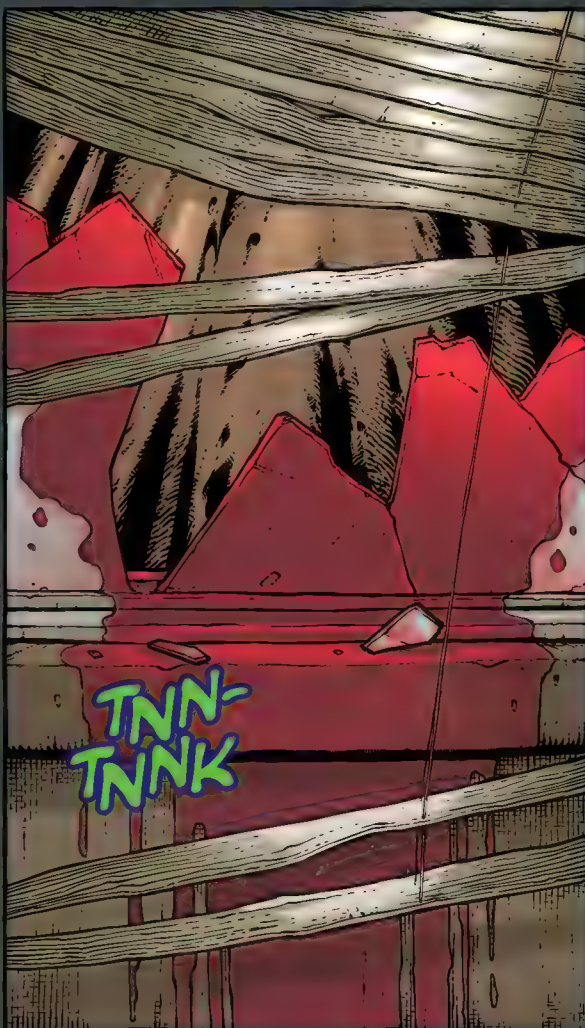


WE NEED
TO GET TO THE
WEAPON'S STORAGE,
BREAK OUT THE RIFLES. I
WANT TO GET A VISUAL
ON THE SURVEILLANCE
SYSTEM. IF WE CAN MAKE
IT TO THE SQUAD CARS
AROUND BACK, WE CAN
GET THE FUCK OUT OF
HERE AND CALL
FOR HELP.



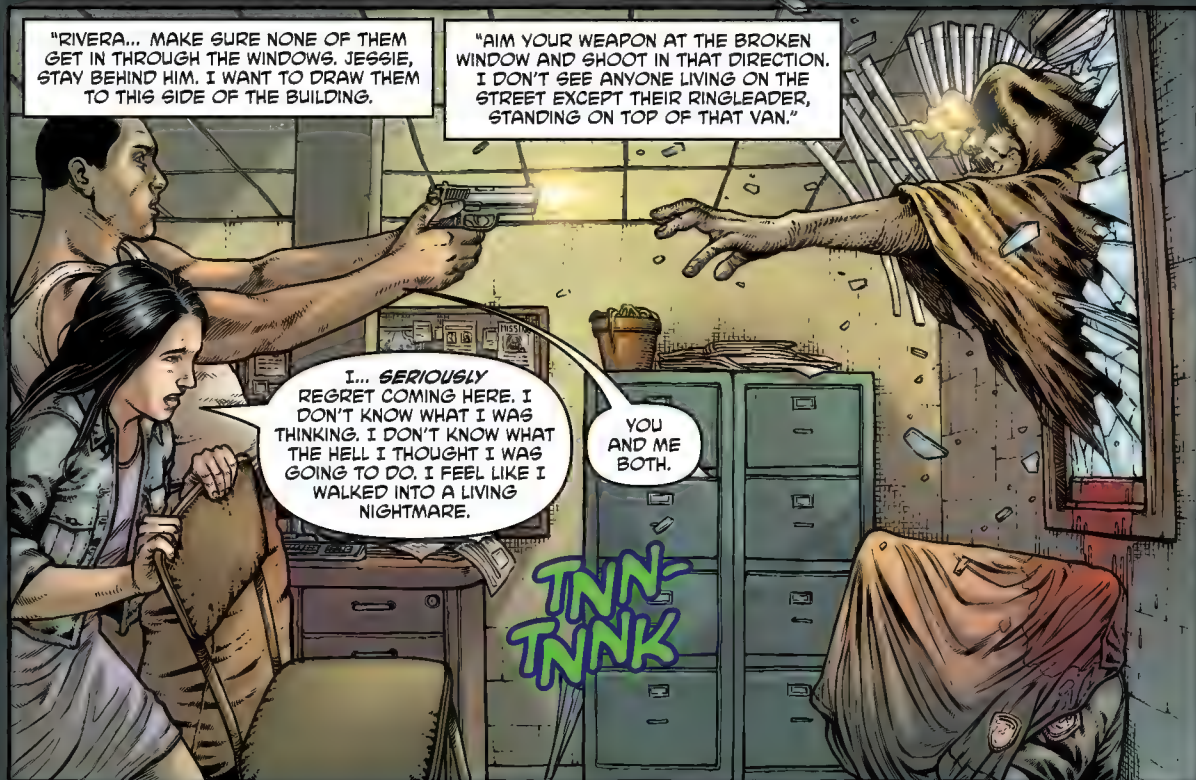
AGK!

HOLY
SHIT.



TNN-
TNKK





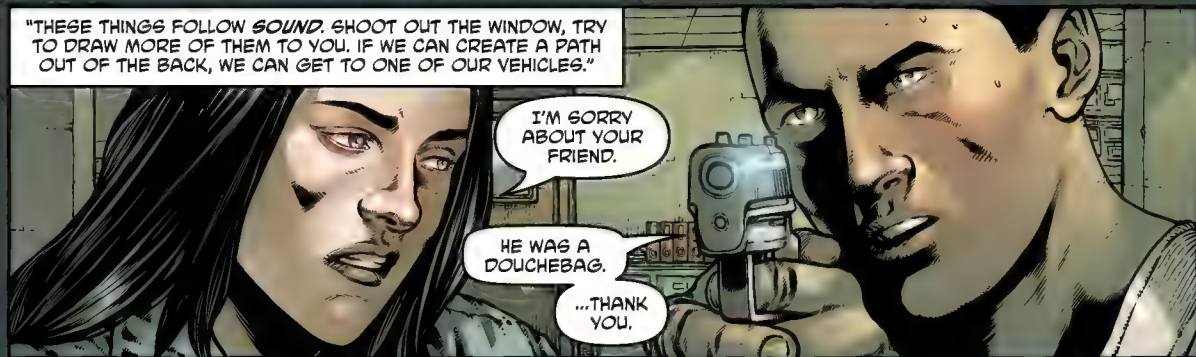
"RIVERA... MAKE SURE NONE OF THEM GET IN THROUGH THE WINDOWS. JESSIE, STAY BEHIND HIM. I WANT TO DRAW THEM TO THIS SIDE OF THE BUILDING.

"AIM YOUR WEAPON AT THE BROKEN WINDOW AND SHOOT IN THAT DIRECTION. I DON'T SEE ANYONE LIVING ON THE STREET EXCEPT THEIR RINGLEADER, STANDING ON TOP OF THAT VAN."

I... SERIOUSLY REGRET COMING HERE. I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WAS THINKING. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO DO. I FEEL LIKE I WALKED INTO A LIVING NIGHTMARE.

YOU AND ME BOTH.

TNN-TNKK

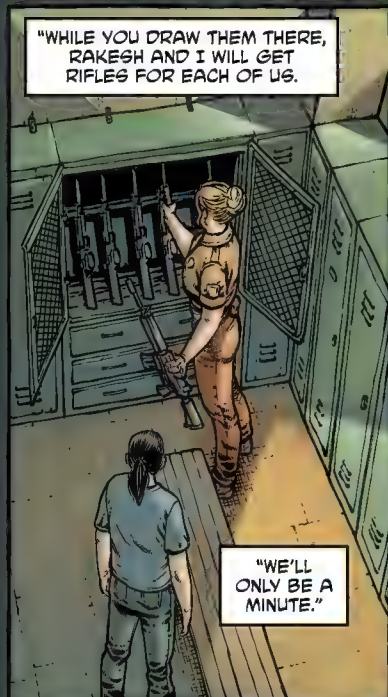


"THESE THINGS FOLLOW SOUND. SHOOT OUT THE WINDOW, TRY TO DRAW MORE OF THEM TO YOU. IF WE CAN CREATE A PATH OUT OF THE BACK, WE CAN GET TO ONE OF OUR VEHICLES."

I'M SORRY ABOUT YOUR FRIEND.

HE WAS A DOUCHEBAG.

...THANK YOU.



"WHILE YOU DRAW THEM THERE, RAKESH AND I WILL GET RIFLES FOR EACH OF US.

"WE'LL ONLY BE A MINUTE."

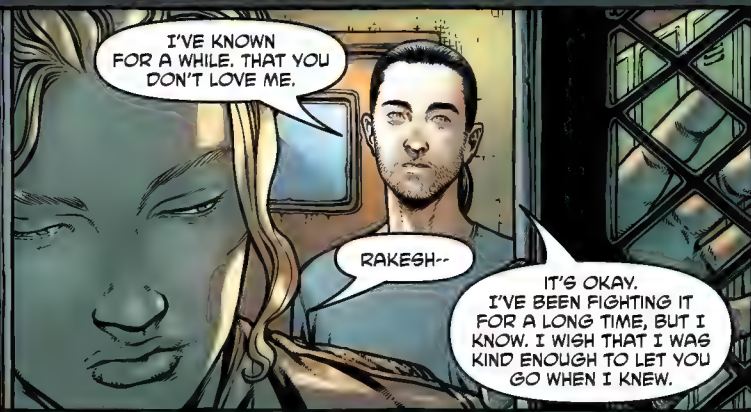
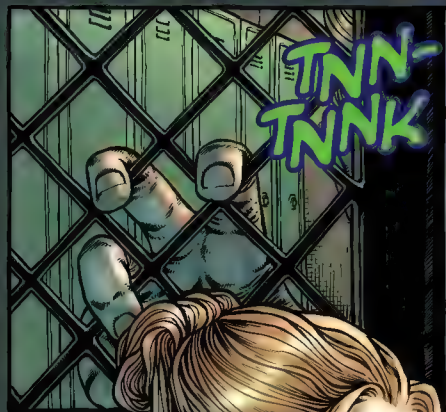
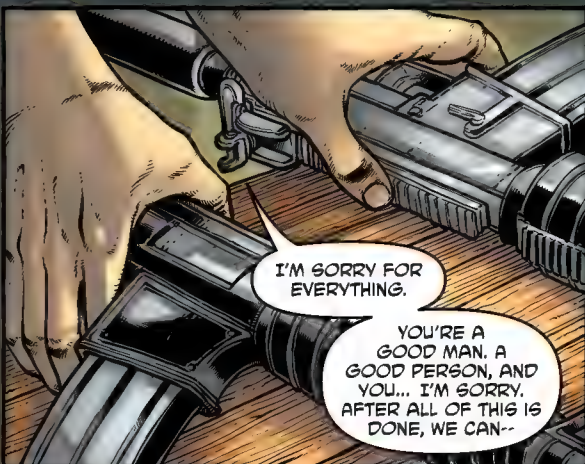


DID THEY... DID THEY MAKE HER INTO ONE OF THOSE THINGS?

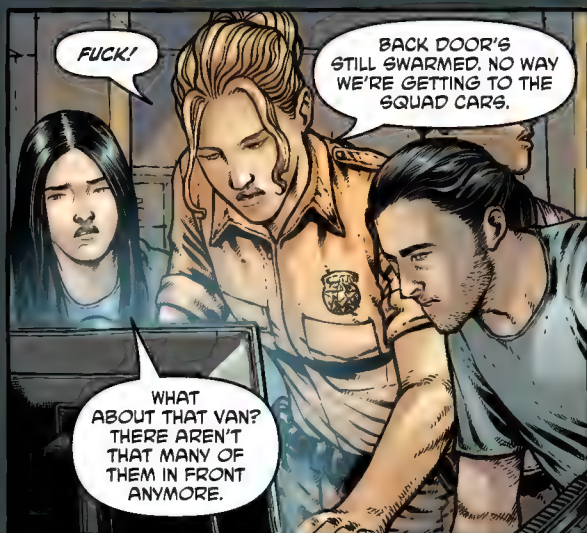


NO. THEY DIDN'T.

TNN-TNKK







WE GOT
ANOTHER
ONE.

TNN-
TNNK

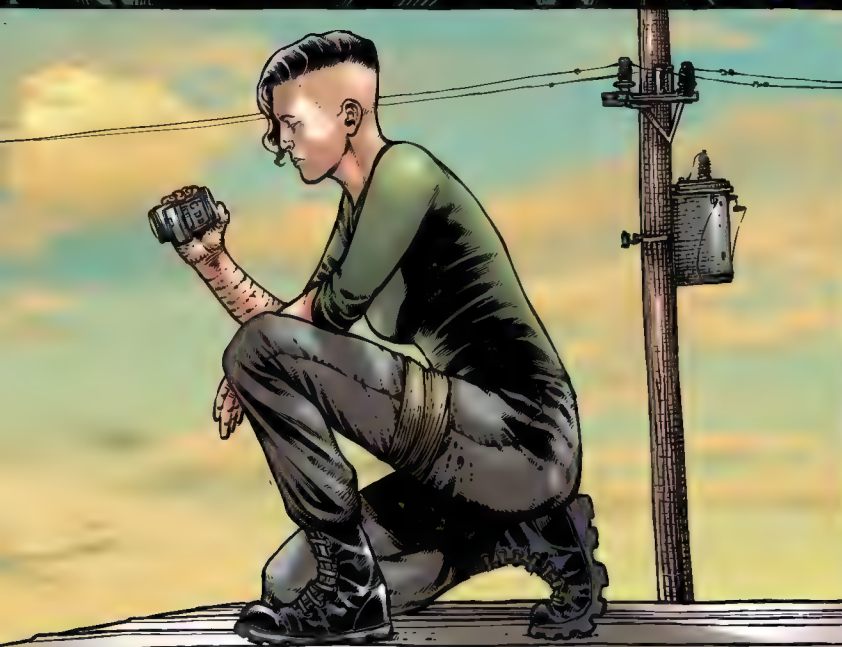
WHAT ABOUT
THAT WOMAN? SURELY
SHE HAS A WEAPON. THE
MOMENT SHE SEES US
COMING, WE'RE OPEN
TARGETS.

WE SHOOT
FIRST.

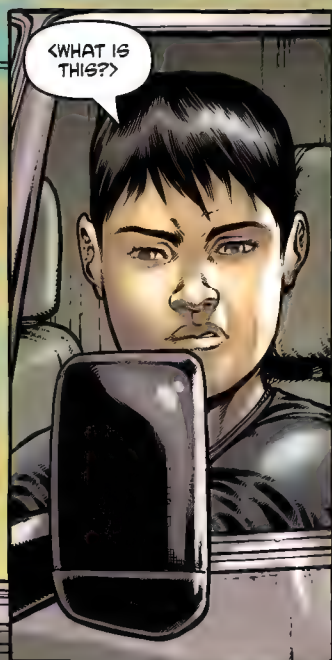
TNN-
TNNK

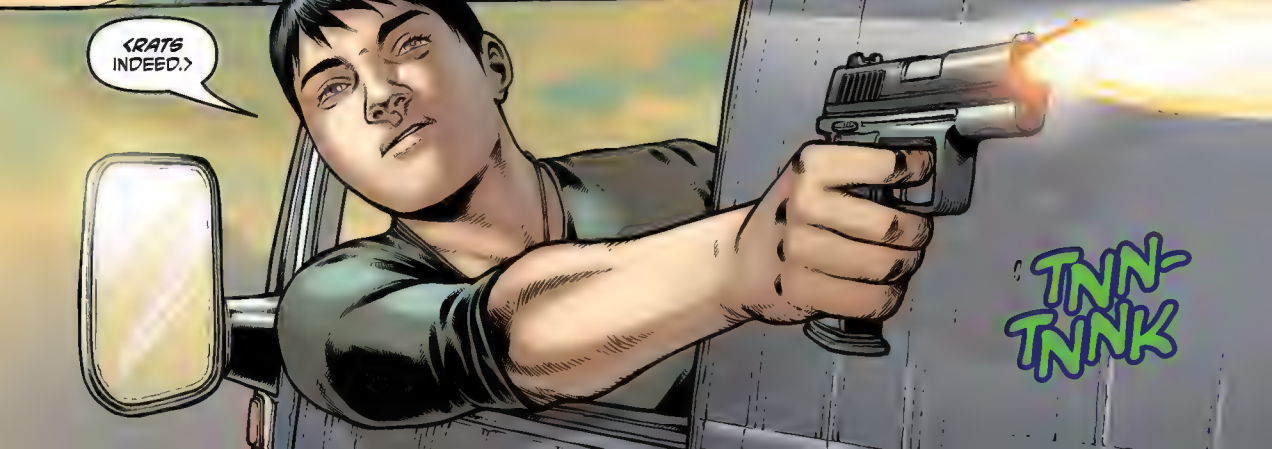
TNN-
TNNK

TNN-
TNNK

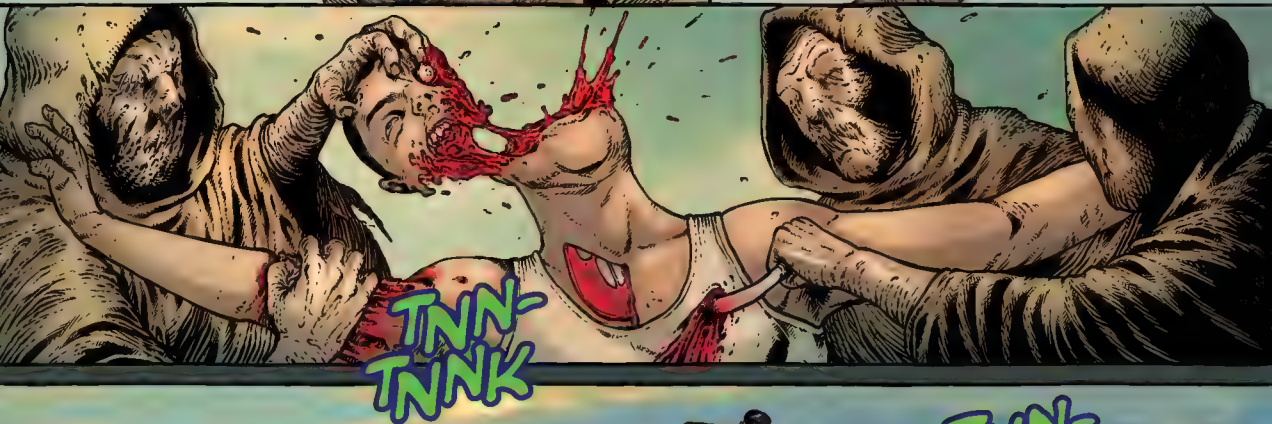
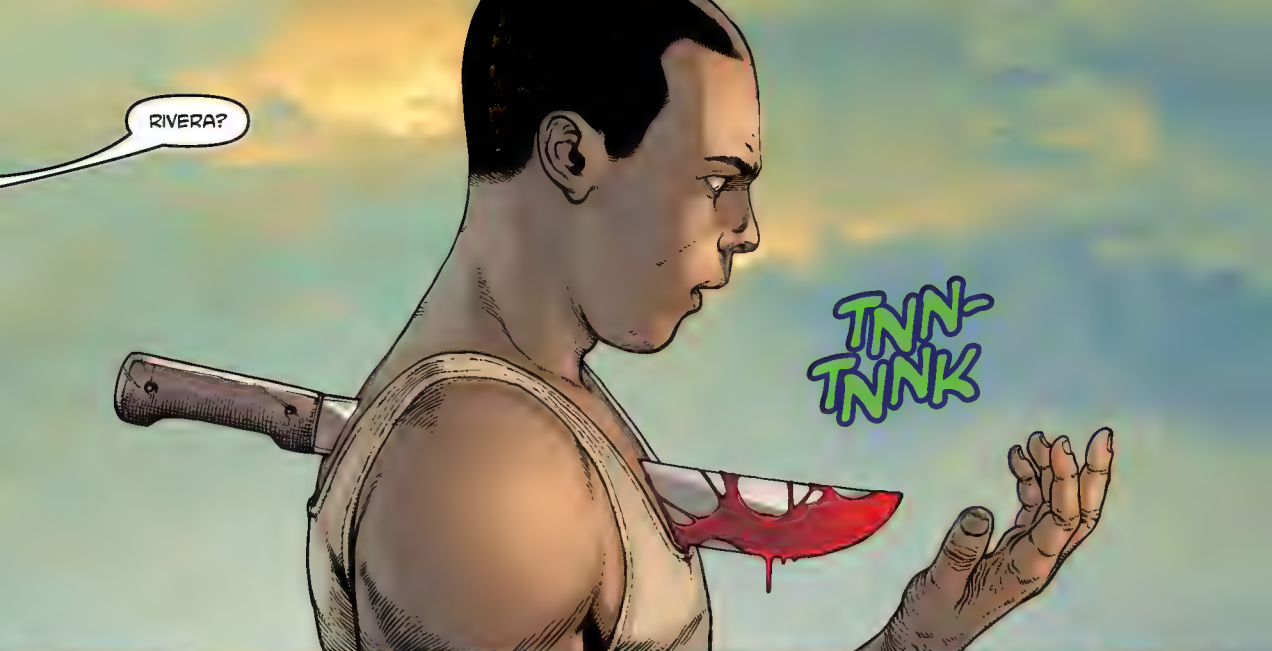


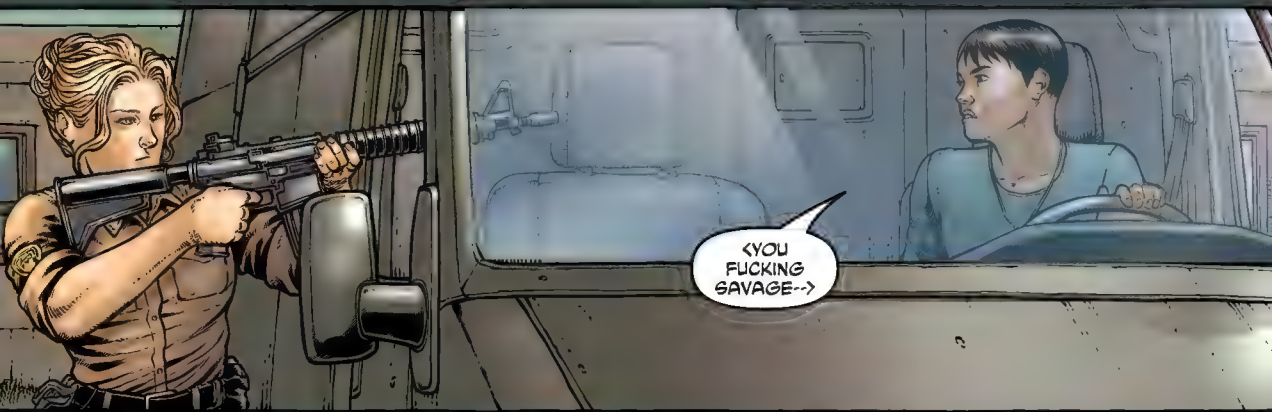
WHAT IS
THIS?

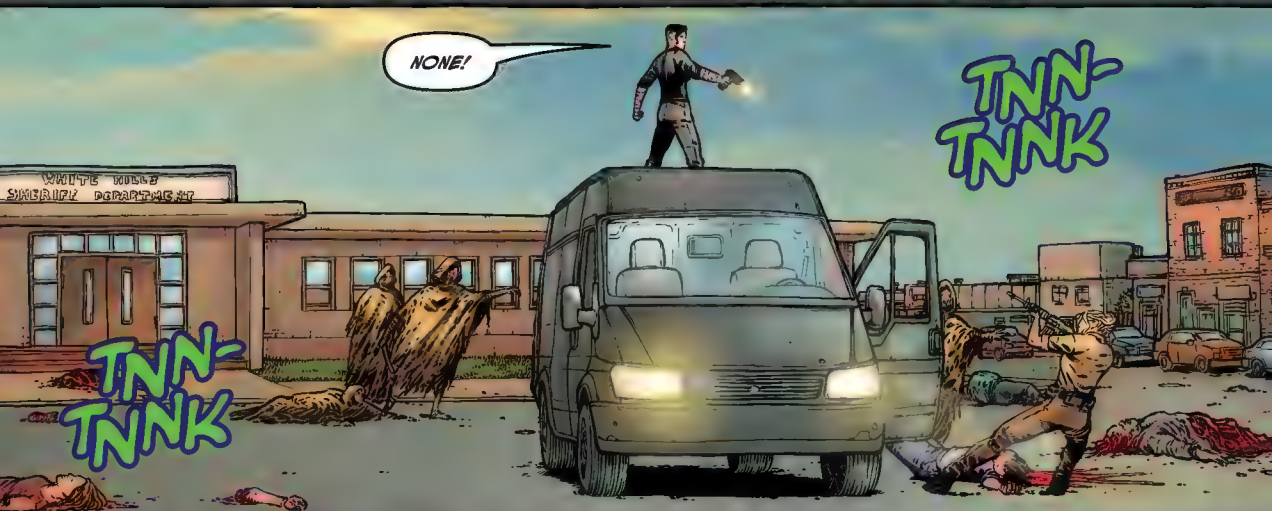
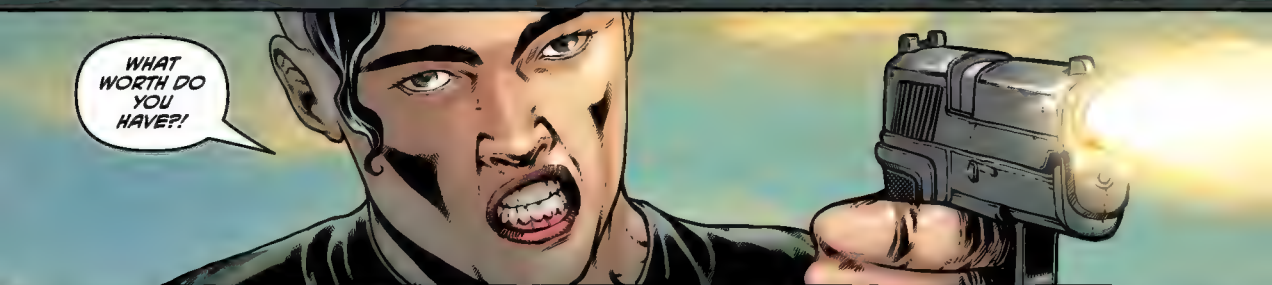


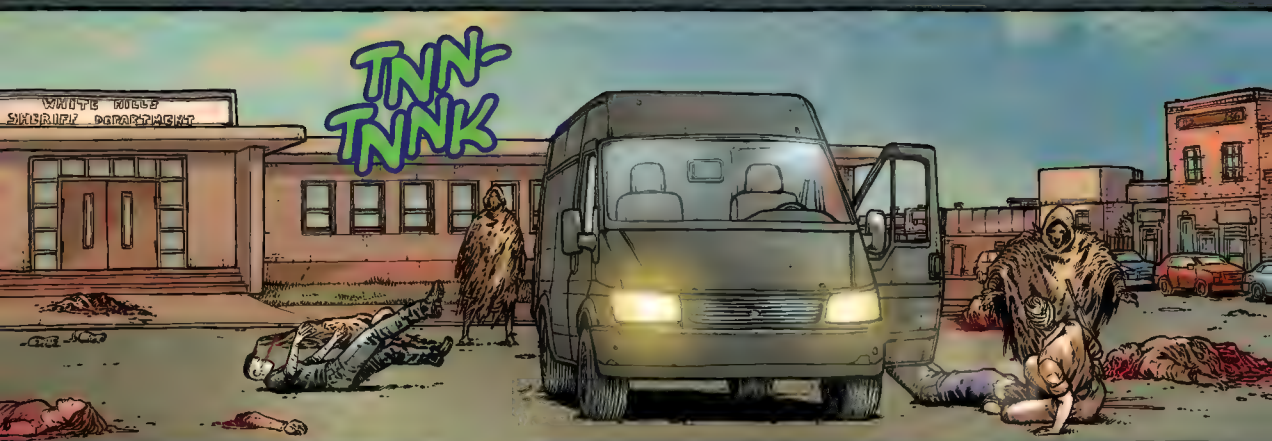


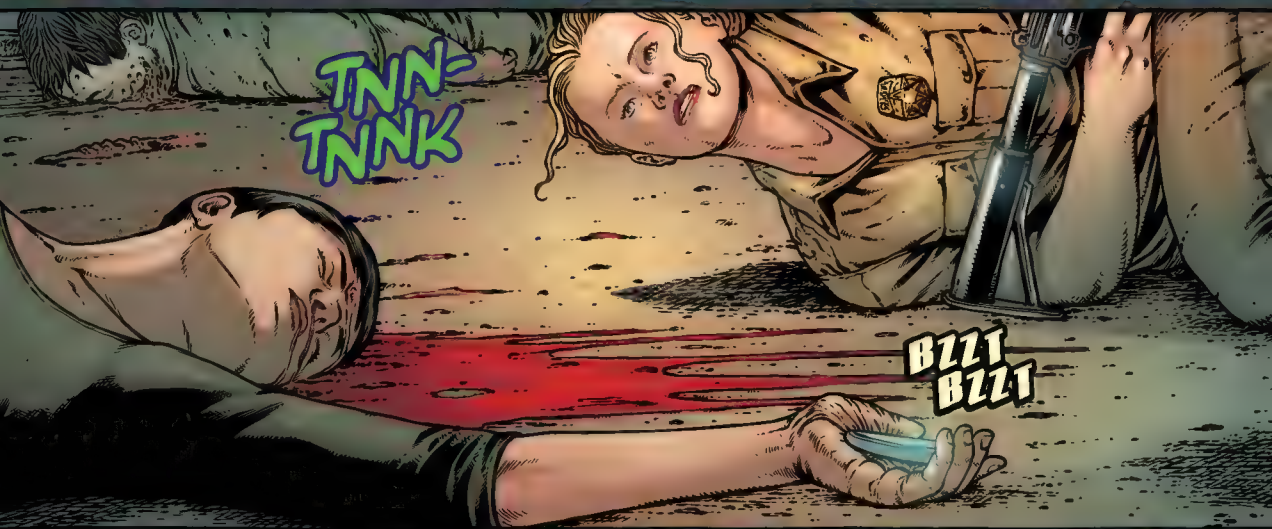
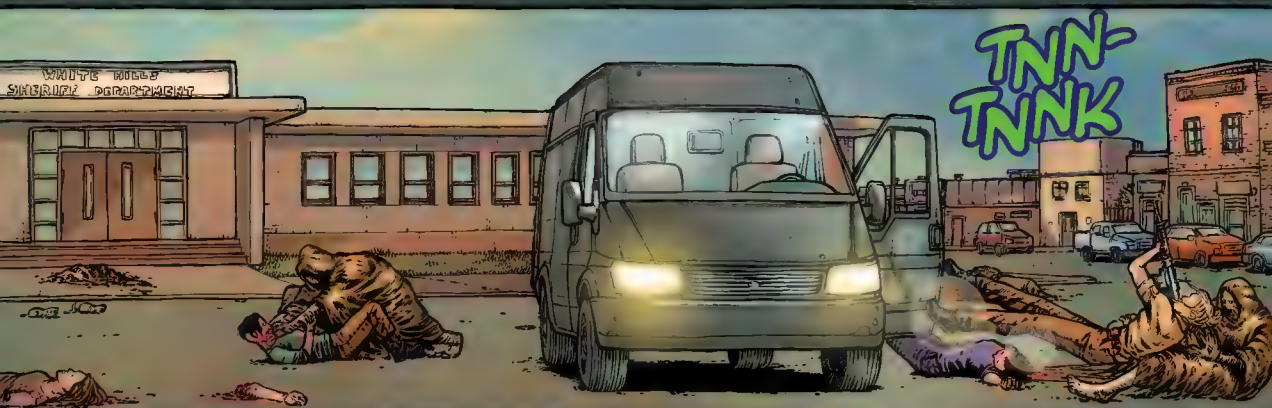


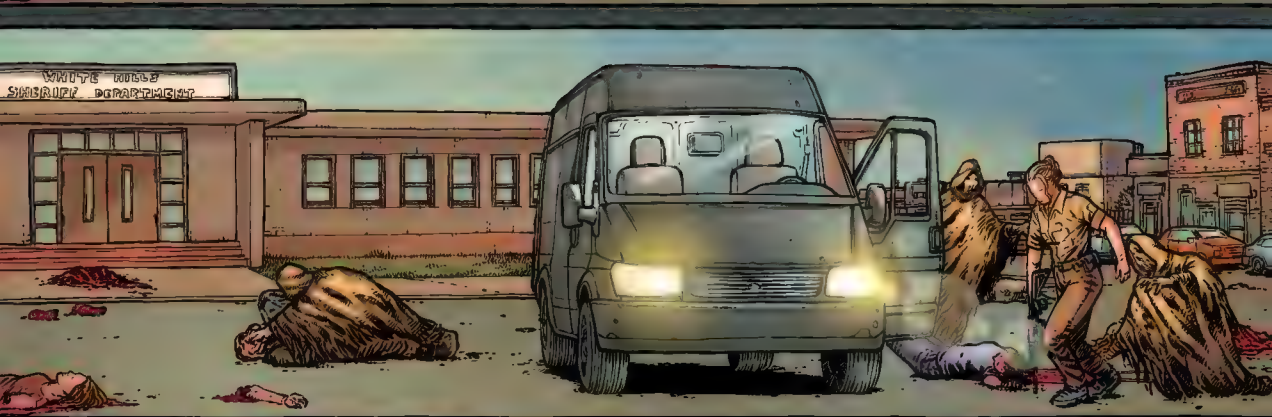
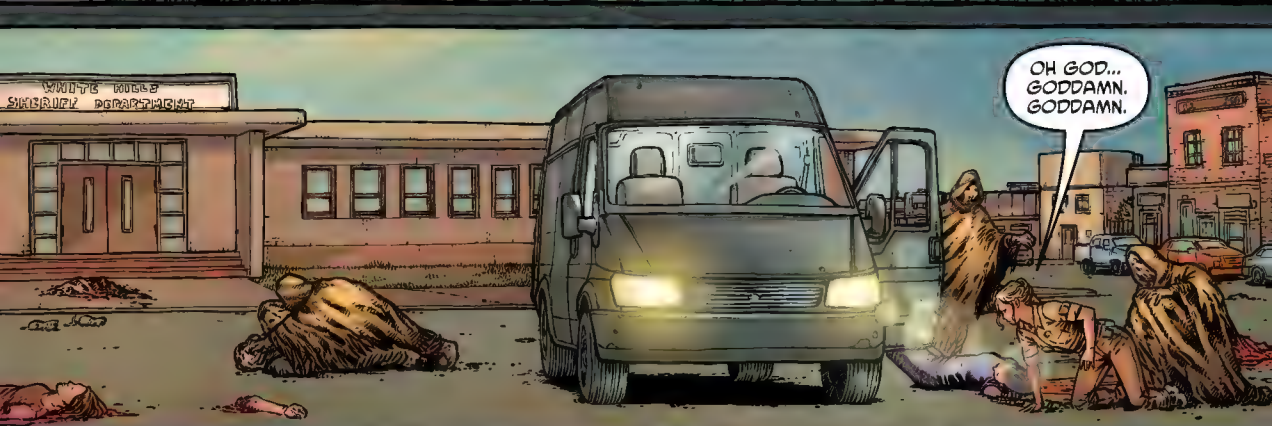
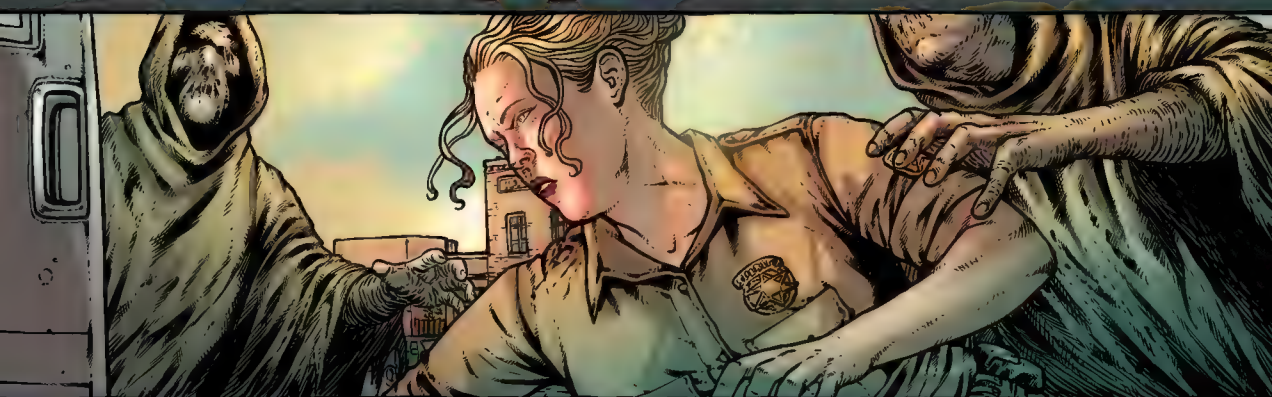
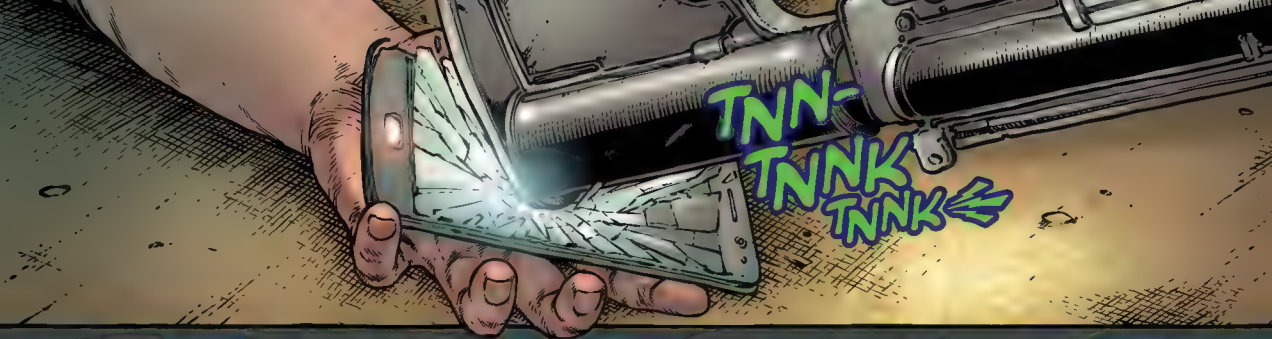


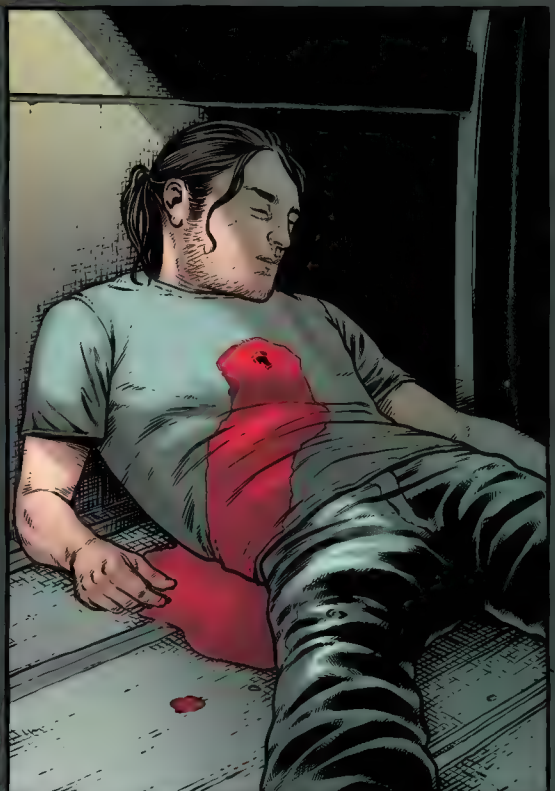
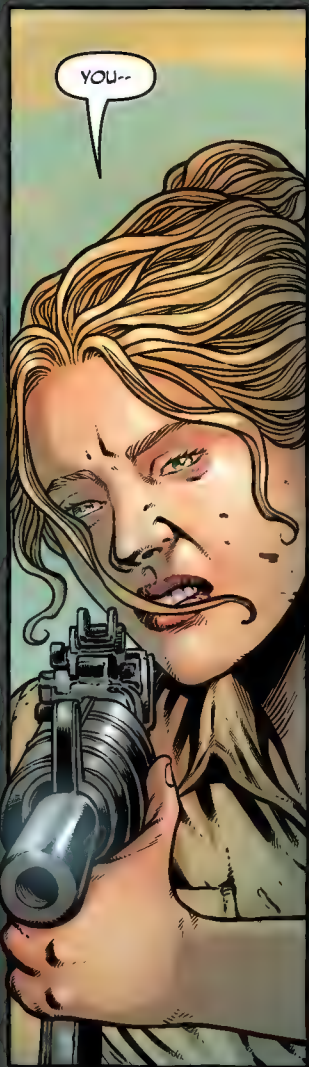


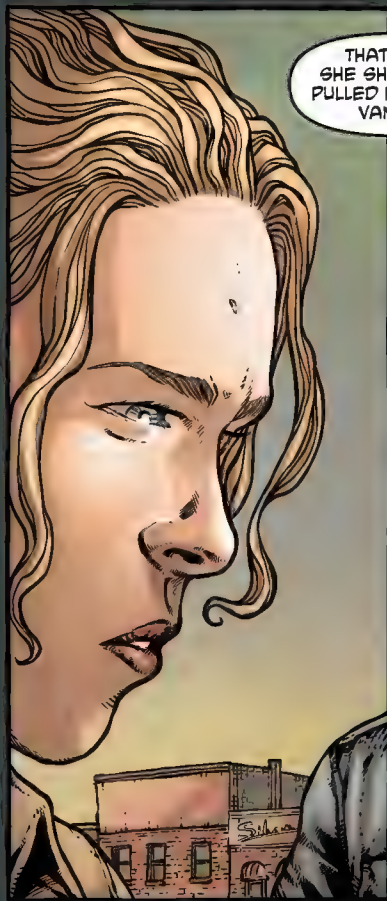




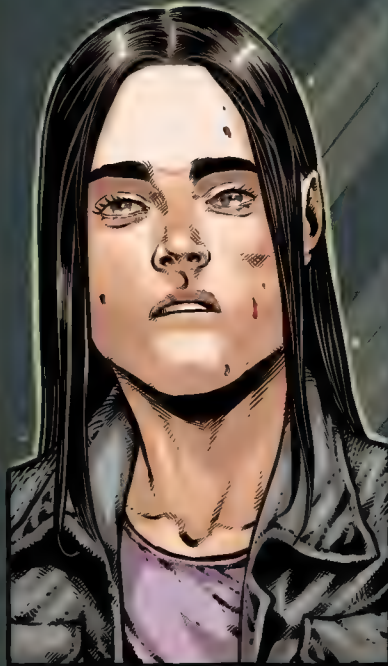








THAT WOMAN,
SHE SHOT AT US. I
PULLED HIM INTO THE
VAN, BUT...



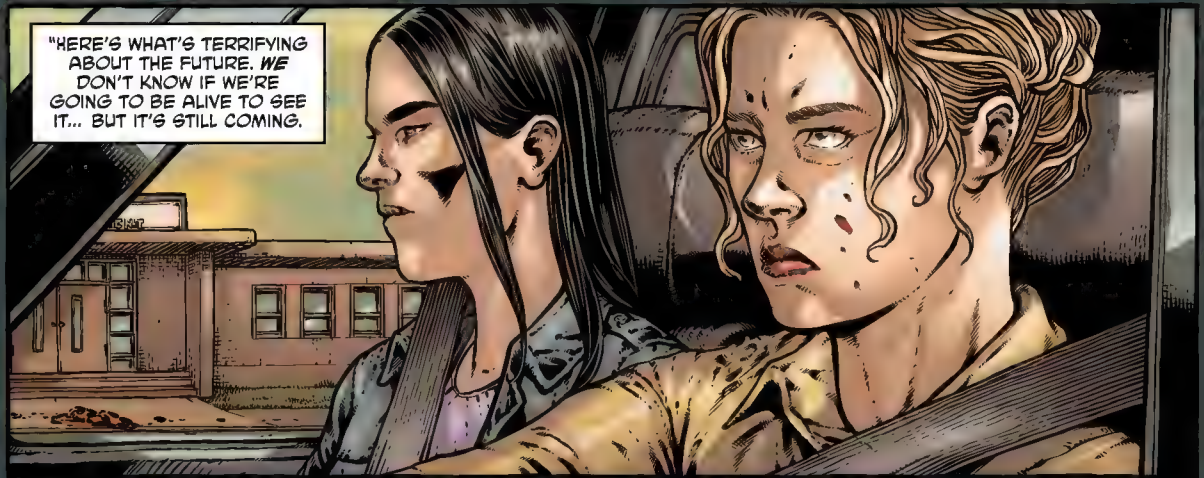
KAT...
WHAT DO WE
DO?



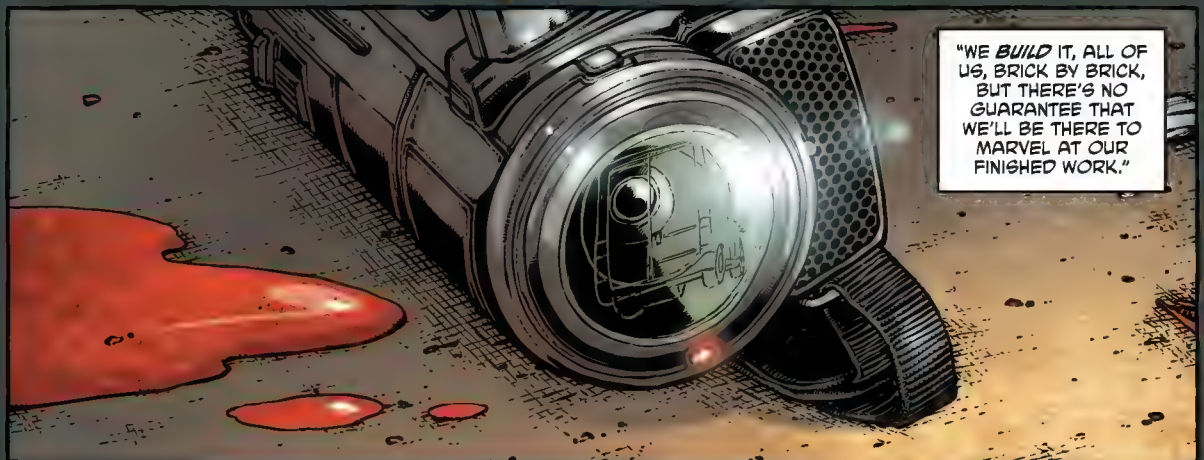
I'LL TAKE YOU HOME IF YOU
WANT. I'M GETTING OUT OF
TOWN AND CALLING FOR *HELP*.
THERE WERE MORE WOMEN AT
THE COMPOUND, AND I DON'T
WANT TO IMAGINE WHAT
HAPPENS WHEN THEY SEE
WHAT WE DID TO THEIR
LEADER.

I'M NOT
STAYING HERE
ALONE AFTER
THIS. CAN I...
CAN I SIT IN
THE VAN WITH
YOU?

YES.



"HERE'S WHAT'S TERRIFYING
ABOUT THE FUTURE. *WE*
DON'T KNOW IF WE'RE
GOING TO BE ALIVE TO SEE
IT... BUT IT'S STILL COMING.



"WE *BUILD* IT, ALL OF
US, BRICK BY BRICK,
BUT THERE'S NO
GUARANTEE THAT
WE'LL BE THERE TO
MARVEL AT OUR
FINISHED WORK."



THAT'S PRIDE
SPEAKING. WE ALL HAVE
IT. I UNDERSTAND. SOME
WOULD SAY THAT IT IS BEST
TO LEAVE PRIDE BEHIND,
BUT NOT US.



YOU MAY
HAVE THOUGHT
WE WERE HERE
FOR RELIGION.
NO.

YOU WILL
START HEARING STORIES
OF OUR "ATTACKS" AND
MANY OF THOSE STORIES
WILL BE *LIES*. SOON,
EVERYONE WILL UNDER-
STAND WHO WE ARE.



BECAUSE WE
ARE ALL TOO AWARE
OF WHAT YOU *THINK*.
AND WE ARE *NOT* WHO
YOU THINK WE ARE.

WE ARE
THE BRICKS THAT
WILL BECOME THE
FUTURE... EVEN IF
WE DON'T GET TO
SEE IT.



WE ARE THE
FOUNDATION OF A
NEW WORLD.



JOIN
US.

END

STITCHED: CADAVER

A GRAPHIC GRIMOIRE





CADAVER - PART THREE

"MOM! DAD!"

JAMILA'S SCREAMS BURST FORTH FROM HER AS IF BY UNCONTROLLABLE FORCE. SHE GRITTED HER TEETH AND CLAMPED HER HANDS OVER HER MOUTH AS SHE DID SO, KNOWING THAT EVEN ALL THE WAY ACROSS THE HOUSE, HER PARENTS WOULD BE COMING IN SECONDS. THEY ALWAYS DID.



SHE COULDN'T HELP THE OUTBURST - IT WAS WHAT SHE KNEW. WHEN SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENED, HER PARENTS WOULD FIX IT. BUT NOW... IN A WORLD WHERE THE BAD MEN WERE ALWAYS WAITING, WHERE THE GREEN MEN SENT HER FATHER HOME A BROKEN MAN, WHERE PEOPLE MADE OTHER PEOPLE INTO WEAPONS TO FIGHT OTHER MEN OVER BELIEF... IT DIDN'T SEEM THAT A COMFORTING HUG FROM HER MOTHER OR FATHER WOULD DO MUCH BUT DISTRACT HER FROM THE HORROR.

AND HESTER WAS OUT THERE, IN THE UNFORGIVING NIGHT, HEADING TOWARD THE SEVERED HEAD.



JAMILA HEARD HER PARENTS COMING TOWARD HER, CALLING HER NAME - AND THEN HER SISTER'S. WITHOUT ANOTHER THOUGHT, JAMILA BOLTED FOR THE FRONT DOOR, UNLOCKED IT, AND FLUNG HERSELF OUT INTO THE NIGHT. HER FEET SLAPPED AGAINST THE GROUND AS SHE SPRINTED TOWARD THE SCHOOL.

IF SHE TOLD THEM, HER PARENTS WOULD GO THEMSELVES. THEY'D INSIST JAMILA STAY HOME WHILE THEY SEARCH FOR HESTER.

AND JAMILA KNEW SHE COULDN'T BEAR TO WAIT FOR EVERYONE SHE LOVED TO RETURN, ALONE.

THE MOMENT THAT JAMILA HEARD HER PARENTS' VOICES RINGING THROUGH THE NIGHT, COMING HER WAY, WAS THE VERY SAME MOMENT THAT THE SKY IN FRONT OF HER, NOT TOO FAR AWAY, FLASHED WITH INCREDIBLE LIGHT, FOLLOWED BY AN EARTH-SHAKING RUMBLE.

JAMILA DIDN'T STOP RUNNING TOWARD THE SCHOOL, EVEN AS THE AIR HEATED UP ON HER FACE. ANOTHER FLASH OF LIGHT WENT OFF TO HER LEFT, AND THEN ANOTHER RIGHT AFTER IT - EACH FLASH PAIRED WITH A BOOMING, UNMISTAKABLE ROAR OF EXPLOSIVES.

JAMILA ONLY STOPPED ONCE THE AREA WHERE HESTER'S SCHOOL ONCE STOOD WAS IN SIGHT. FROM WHERE SHE STOOD, THE AREA LOOKED LIKE IT WAS SLICKED IN OIL AT FIRST - NEARLY UNIFORMLY BLACK. BUT NO... IT WAS CHARRED, WITH SMOKE THAT HUNG OVER THE GROUND LIKE FOG, RAISING FROM THE GROUND IN THICK, MILKY PLUMES. THE SMELL WAS OVERWHELMING, A MIXTURE OF BURNING FOOD AND GASOLINE, AND BURNED JAMILA'S LUNGS SO BADLY THAT SHE DIDN'T KNOW IF SHE COULD TAKE A STEP FORWARD TO SEE IF HER SISTER WAS IN THERE. IF SHE... IF HESTER...

JAMILA FELT HER MOTHER'S ARMS AROUND HER FROM BEHIND BEFORE SHE EVEN FELT THE WAILING SOB RINGING OUT FROM HER THROAT.

THE GROUND SHAKING AND MORE FLASHES LIGHTING UP THE NIGHT, JAMILA ALLOWED HERSELF TO MELT INTO HER MOTHER'S EMBRACE. SHE WATCHED HER FATHER WALK PAST HER AND INTO THE SMOKE, LIKE A CHARACTER FROM AN AMERICAN MOVIE - SLOW MOVING AND STOIC, STATUESQUE AS HE TURNED INTO A SILHOUETTE. IN AN INSTANT, THOUGH, HE TURNED AROUND, LOOKING BACK TOWARD JAMILA AND HER MOTHER WITH DESPERATION, HIS EYES WIDE AND HIS CHIN QUIVERING.

"I DON'T KNOW WHERE..." HE MANAGED. HE WALKED OVER TO THEM AND LET OUT A RATTLING COUGH THAT TURNED INTO A SERIES OF SOBS. "I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR. I DON'T SEE HER."

"JAMILA, YOU'RE SURE SHE CAME HERE?" HER MOTHER ASKED, URGENT.

"I..."

"PLEASE, HURRY," HER FATHER SAID, TOUCHING HIS FACE. "WE HAVE TO GET YOU INSIDE. WE CAN'T BE OUT HERE."

"WHAT'S HAPPENING?" JAMILA ASKED.

"THE AMERICANS," HER FATHER SAID. "THEY WERE - *WE* WERE ATTACKED. THEY PULLED OUT, AND..."

"THE GREEN MEN?" JAMILA EXCLAIMED. AS SOON AS THE WORDS LEFT HER MOUTH, THE PHRASE BORROWED FROM HESTER, SHE FELT SILLY. LIKE A CHILD. "THE AMERICANS... THEY DID THIS?"



HER FATHER LOOKED AWAY, SEARCHING FOR WHAT TO SAY. HE OPENED HIS MOUTH TO SPEAK AFTER A MOMENT, BUT A SOUND FROM ACROSS THE BURNT, RUINED SCHOOLYARD INTERRUPTED HIM.

"PLEASE..."

A MAN WAS THERE, IN THE DISTANCE, BEHIND WHAT LOOKED LIKE IT HAD BEEN SOME KIND OF VEHICLE. HE WAS CRAWLING OUT FROM BEHIND THE BUS, OVER THE HOT, SMOKING GROUND, HIS FACE MARRED WITH BURNS THAT EXPOSED WET, RED FLESH UNDER HIS CHEEK. A NEW, THICK PUDDLE OF BLOOD WAS LEFT WITH EACH PATHETIC MOVEMENT ACROSS THE GROUND. IT FLOWED FROM THE BLOODY STUMPS OF HIS ARM AND LEG. USING HIS ONE REMAINING HAND, HE PULLED HIMSELF TOWARD THEM.

HE WORE GARB THAT JAMILA RECOGNIZED ALL TOO WELL. HE WAS ONE OF THE BAD MEN.

JAMILA'S FATHER STEPPED ONTO THE CHARRED GROUND, STARING DOWN AT THE MAN. "TAKE JAMILA HOME," HE SAID, GLANCING OVER HIS SHOULDER AT THEM.

HER MOTHER PULLED AT HER, BUT JAMILA WRENCHED HERSELF FREE. SHE RAN AWAY FROM HER MOTHER, WHO LET OUT A WEAK CRY, AND UP TO HER FATHER. HE LOOKED DOWN AT HER, AT A LOSS FOR WORDS, BUT SHE IGNORED HIM. SHE DIDN'T CARE IF SHE'D BE IN TROUBLE. SHE HAD TO KNOW.

"DID YOU SEE A LITTLE GIRL HERE?" SHE ASKED.

"PLEASE," THE MAN REPEATED, HIS VOICE WEAK AND CRACKING LIKE A BOY COMING OF AGE. THE BURNS ON HIS FACE PRODUCED FRESH BLOOD AS HE STRETCHED HIS MOUTH TO PRODUCE TWO MORE PAINED WORDS: "**KILL ME.**"

"COME, JAMILA," HER FATHER SAID, REACHING FOR HER HAND. "WE HAVE TO GO."

"DID YOU SEE," JAMILA SAID, HER VOICE DARKENING AS SHE STOOD OVER THE MAN, "A LITTLE GIRL HERE?"

THE MAN HELD HER GAZE FOR A MOMENT BEFORE SLOWLY LOWERING HIS HEAD UP AND DOWN, THEN AGAIN. HE TURNED HIS FACE BACK TOWARD THE REMAINS OF THE SCHOOL.

"**THERE.**"

JAMILA DESPERATELY SCANNED THE UNRECOGNIZABLE AREA THAT HAD BEEN SO FAMILIAR, THE AREA WHERE SHE AND HER SISTER HAD TRIED TO DIG THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE. THERE WERE BODIES, BUT THEY WEREN'T DISTINGUISHABLE. THEY'D BEEN BLOWN TO PIECES AND BURNED - AND JAMILA EXPECTED MOST WERE FROM THAT VAN. SHE HAD HOPES THAT HESTER SAW THEM AND RAN, RAN RAN RAN, UNTIL SHE FOUND A PLACE TO HIDE, SAFE FROM THE BAD MEN, AND SAFE FROM THE VENGEANCE OF THE AMERICANS.

THAT WAS WHEN SHE SAW IT.

SMALL AND CRUMPLED, A SKELETAL HAND THAT COULD FIT IN THE PALM OF JAMILA'S OWN REACHING OUT FROM UNDER A BLACKENED BEAM FROM THE SCHOOL BUILDING. JAMILA REACHED DOWN TO GRAB THE HAND, BUT WAS AFRAID THAT HESTER WOULD FALL TO ASH IF SHE TOUCHED HER. ALL SHE COULD DO IS STARE AND WEEP IN SILENCE, EVEN AS A NEW SOUND BEGAN TO BUILD IN THE DISTANCE.

SCREAMS.

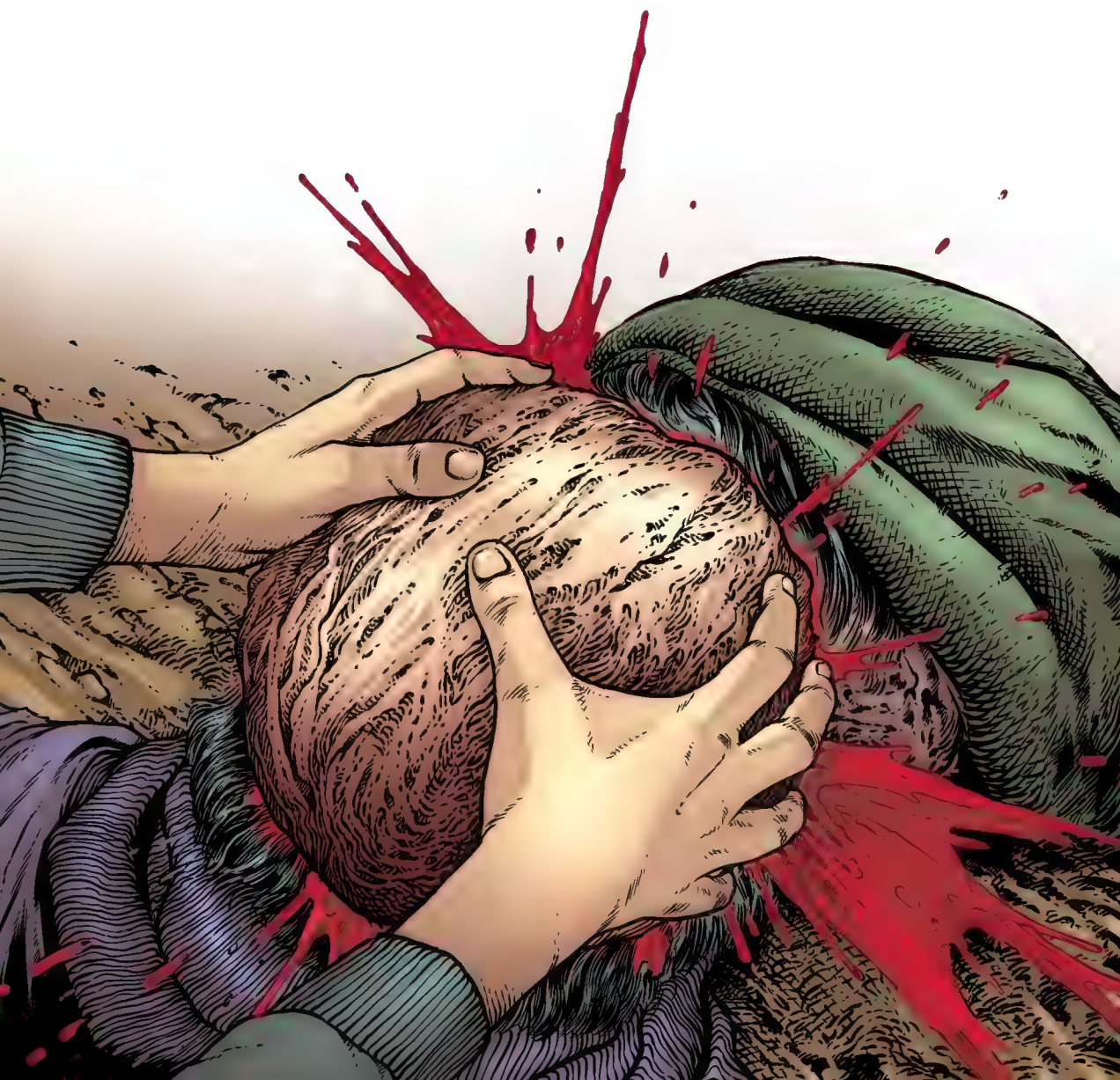
"JAMILA!" HER MOTHER SAID THROUGH A SOB. "WE HAVE TO GET INSIDE, PLEASE! SOMETHING TERRIBLE..."

JAMILA BEGAN WALKING TOWARD HER, HER LEGS MADE OF WHAT FELT LIKE STATIC. NOTHING AROUND HER, THE BLAZING SKY AND THE ACRID SMOKE, THE CACOPHONY OF SCREAMS, THE BODY OF HER SISTER AND THE TRUTH OF HER DEATH - NONE OF IT SEEMED REAL. ALL THAT JAMILA COULD FOCUS ON WAS THE MAN ON THE GROUND BEFORE HER, HIS HAND RESTING ON A ROCK. IT WAS JAGGED, MAYBE CEMENT BLOWN AWAY FROM THE SCHOOL'S FOUNDATION IN THE BLAST. HE WAS TRYING TO PULL HIMSELF CLOSER TO JAMILA'S PANICKING FATHER, BUT HE WAS NO LONGER STRONG ENOUGH TO MOVE.

JAMILA HURRIED OVER TO HIM, KNOWING SHE ONLY HAD A MOMENT BEFORE HER PANICKING PARENTS WOULD GRAB HER.

"JAMILA!" HER MOTHER CRIED.

"WHY DID YOU COME HERE TONIGHT?" JAMILA ASKED, REMOVING HIS HAND FROM THE ROCK.



"NOTHING... NOTHING TO SAY..." HE SAID.

JAMILA GRABBED THE ROCK IN HER OWN HANDS. "WHY DO YOU DO THIS? WHY DO YOU DO WHAT YOU DO?"

"**JAMILA!**" HER FATHER'S VOICE WAS RAW, LOUDER THAN SHE'D HEARD HIM YELL BEFORE. HE WAS ABOUT TO BE ON HER. SHE COULD BARELY HEAR THE MAN'S ANSWER ABOVE HER FATHER'S SCREAM, BUT SHE COULD READ HIS LIPS FOR CERTAIN. SHE'D NEVER FORGET HOW HIS BURNED FACE TWISTED INTO A SMILE AS HE SAID THE WORD.

"**FAITH...**"

SHE BROUGHT THE ROCK DOWN ON HIS SKULL AND DIDN'T STOP SMASHING IT UP AND DOWN UNTIL HER PARENTS, SCREAMING LIKE THEY WERE BEING KILLED THEMSELVES, DRAGGED HER AWAY.

THE THREE OF THEM RAN BACK TO THEIR HOME, LEAVING THE SOURCE OF THE SCREAMS TO JAMILA'S IMAGINATION. ALL SHE SAW, THOUGH, WERE FIGURES MOVING THROUGH THE NIGHT, HOODED SILHOUETTES, AND THE DISTANT SOUND OF A METALLIC RATTLE. SHE KNEW THE BAD MEN WERE FIGHTING BACK OVER THE AMERICANS, AND ALMOST COULDN'T HELP BUT LAUGH. NONE OF THEM KNEW, SHE THOUGHT, WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE LIKE HER. TO LOSE HESTER. SOMETHING WAS **SICK** IN THEIR SOULS - NO ONE WHO HAD HUMANITY COULD DO THIS.

THEY BOTH HAD FAITH, JAMILA THOUGHT, THAT **THEY** WERE RIGHT. THAT THEY WERE MAKING A BETTER WORLD.

AND LOOK AT THE HELL THEY'D BROUGHT...

MANY YEARS LATER

THERE WAS NO ONE JAMILA TRUSTED MORE THAN THE WOMEN WHO WALKED BEHIND HER ON THIS FATEFUL DAY. SHE ONCE THOUGHT THAT SHE'D NEVER CALL ANOTHER PERSON FAMILY AGAIN, BUT THESE WOMEN... THEY MADE HER FEEL LIKE SHE WAS NO LONGER THAT LOST GIRL, SEARCHING IN A BURNT, SMOKING MESS FOR HER SISTER'S REMAINS.

SHE WALKED TOWARD THE AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGIST CAMP, THE GUN HEAVY IN HER HANDS AND READY TO SHOOT SHOULD THE SURVIVOR THEY LEFT BEHIND TRY ANYTHING NASTY. SHE TRUSTED FARIBA, THOUGH, WHO STOOD OVER THE MAN WITH EXCITEMENT IN HER EYE. SHE REMINDED JAMILA OF HESTER, SOMETIMES, IN HER BOUNDLESS CURIOSITY AND THIRST FOR THRILL. SHE LOVED FARIBA. AND ON THIS NIGHT, SHE'D PLAYED HER PART WELL.

STEPPING OVER THE BULLET-RIDDLED CORPSE OF AN AMERICAN, JAMILA APPROACHED FARIBA.

"THANK YOU, FARIBA," SHE SAID. "YOU WILL SOON BE REWARDED FOR YOUR WORK. I RECOGNIZE THAT IT IS HARD TO MOVE AMONG THE SOULLESS AND TREAT THEM LIKE PEOPLE."

"IS THIS GOING TO BE THE FIRST, JAMILA? ARE WE GOING TO DO IT HERE?"

"HM." JAMILA FURROWED HER BROW. SHE HADN'T BEEN PLANNING ON IT, BUT THE IDEA INTRIGUED HER. "BRING ME ONE OF THE BARRELS. AND BE CAREFUL. WE MUST NOT SPILL A SINGLE, PRECIOUS DROP. AND FETCH THE NEEDLE AND THREAD."



JAMILA WAITED PATIENTLY, SITTING ON THE BACK OF THE TRUCK AS THE SUN CAME UP. SHE HAD ONE OF HER GIRLS, VIDA, POUR THE SUBSTANCE INTO THE AMERICAN'S MOUTH AFTER HIS OTHER ORIFICES WERE STITCHED UP. AFTER THAT, HIS LIPS HAD BEEN SEWN SHUT AS WELL. IT SEEMED LESS CRUEL THAT JAMILA HAD IMAGINED AS A LITTLE GIRL WHEN HER MOTHER FIRST TOLD HER THE HORROR STORIES ABOUT THE STITCHED THAT ONE NIGHT. IT SEEMED DETACHED, ALMOST SURGICAL IN NATURE.

AFTER ALL, *HE* WASN'T REALLY A HUMAN BEING. HE WAS ONE OF THEM - "THE GREEN MEN" SHE'D ONCE CALLED THEM, EVEN THOUGH NOT ALL OF THEM HAD UNIFORMS. THEY ALL REPRESENTED THE SAME THING. THE SAME IDEA THAT THEY'D FIGHT FOR, KILL FOR.

AS LONG AS MEN LIKE THAT EXISTED, GIRLS LIKE HESTER WOULD DIE.

JAMILA HEARD FARIBA'S LIGHT SNORES COMING FROM THE PASSENGER SEAT OF THE CAR. SHE DESERVED THE REST, BUT JAMILA WAS GETTING ANXIOUS TO TEST OUT THEIR NEW WEAPON, AND KNEW FARIBA WOULDN'T WANT TO MISS THIS. SHE LOOKED SO INNOCENT, SO GLEEFUL AS THEY'D DONNED THE STITCHED MAN IN THE TRADITIONAL ROBES. NOW THAT TIME HAD PASSED, THE UNEARTHED TAR SHOULD HAVE DONE ITS WORK. THEY'D KNOW SOON IF THIS WAS THE *REAL* STUFF.

WHEN FARIBA WAS UP, SHE CALLED THE OTHER WOMEN WHO HAD JOINED JAMILA'S CAUSE OVER. THEY HAD QUITE A GROUP, AND JAMILA KNEW THAT BY THE TIME THEIR NUMBERS WOULD MATTER MOST, THEY'D GROW. FOR NOW, THEY HAD ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD.

"ARE YOU READY?" JAMILA ASKED. THE CAN WAS PLACED AT HER FEET, LOOKING AS INNOCUOUS AN ITEM AS ANYTHING FROM A COMMON KITCHEN.

HER QUESTION WAS MET WITH A RESOUNDING CRY OF APPROVAL.

THE STITCHED WAS HUNCHED IN THE DISTANCE, CRUMPED ON THE GROUND A FEW YARDS FROM WHERE THEY'D SET UP CAMP.





JAMILA REACHED DOWN AND PICKED UP THE CAN. SHE JERKED HER ARM BACK AND FORTH, JUST AS HER CAPTIVE HAD TOLD HER, PRODUCING A STRANGE, TINNY SOUND:

TNN-TNNK

TNN-TNNK

TNN-TNNK

IT WAS SUDDEN, LIKE A TOWEL PICKED UP BY A SWIFT GUST OF WIND. THE STITCHED ROSE TO ITS FEET AND STALKED TOWARD JAMILA AND HER CREW WITH SURPRISING SPEED. ITS STRIDES WERE POWERFUL AND PURPOSELY, NOT AT ALL LIKE JAMILA HAD PICTURED. PERHAPS AMERICAN ZOMBIE MOVIES HAD SET THE EXPECTATION, BUT NO - THIS THING MOVED WITH THE EFFICIENCY AND SINGLE-MINDEDNESS OF A KILLER ROBOT. THERE WAS NOTHING HUMAN ABOUT IT.

CHEERING ALL AROUND JAMILA BROKE INTO UNCERTAIN CHATTER AS THE STITCHED CAME AT THEM. JAMILA SET THE CAN DOWN BEFORE IT WAS WITHIN THREE YARDS OF THEM. LIKE AN APPLIANCE SWITCHED OFF, THE STITCHED INSTANTLY CAME TO A STOP, ITS BACK LEG BENT AND IN MID-MOTION, ITS HANDS STRETCHING OUT AS IF BLINDLY SEARCHING FOR A NECK TO FIND. SUDDENLY, IT WAS A STATUE.

JAMILA LOOKED DOWN TO THE GROUND AS TEARS RAN FROM HER EYES, CURVING DOWN HER NOSE. FOR A MOMENT, SHE WAS EMBARRASSED AS FARIBA AND ANOTHER LOYAL WOMAN, DANALI, CAME TO HER SIDE, TOUCHING HER SHOULDERS SOLDIERS. THEY HAD TO BE PEOPLE.

"I'M OKAY," JAMILA SAID, HER VOICE THICK. "THANK YOU. I JUST... I THOUGHT BACK TO WHEN I FIRST SAW ONE OF THESE. IT CHANGED EVERYTHING... BACK THEN. MY SISTER SAID SOMETHING TO ME THAT I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER. SHE DIDN'T MEAN IT IN ANY WAY EXPECT..."

FARIBA STARED AT HER, WAITING FOR HER TO FINISH.

JAMILA JUST SMILED. "YOU KNOW WHAT? IF WE GET THROUGH THIS WEEK, I'LL TELL YOU WHAT SHE SAID. I THINK YOU'LL LIKE IT." AND ASKING IF SHE WAS OKAY. SHE FOUGHT THE INSTINCT, THOUGH. SHE WANTED THEM TO KNOW HER. AND FOR THAT TO HAPPEN, SHE HAD TO BE VULNERABLE. SHE HAD TO BE HERSELF.

THEY WEREN'T

THAT NIGHT, JAMILA RETURNED TO THE SHACK WHERE THEY'D LEFT THEIR CAPTIVE. HE WAS STILL THERE, SHOUTING OUT OBSCENITIES AND VOWING THAT HIS GOD WOULD KNOW HER AND HER DEEDS WHEN SHE DIED. "THE BAD MEN" HAD CHANGED SINCE SHE WAS YOUNG. DIFFERENT NAMES, DIFFERENT IDEAS, DIFFERENT MEN - OR SO THEY SAID. TO JAMILA, THEY WERE ALL THE SAME. EACH WAS A CELL IN A LARGER SICKNESS, JUST LIKE THE AMERICANS.

"I WANTED TO KILL YOU THE NIGHT I FOUND YOU," JAMILA SAID.

HE SNEERED AT HER. "YOU SHOULD HAVE. YOU MUST KNOW BY NOW THAT I WON'T GIVE ANY MORE DAMNED INFORMATION."

JAMILA SMILED. "MY MOTHER, MAY HER SOUL BE AT PEACE... SHE WAS TAKEN ONCE, BY MEN LIKE YOU. THEY CUT HER THROAT. AND YET, SHE HAD IT WITHIN HER TO KEEP GOING. TO FIND A FAMILY, TO FIND LOVE, TO RAISE ME WITH WARMTH AND KINDNESS. IT'S BECAUSE OF *HER* THAT I SEE WHAT I DO IN YOU."

HE STARED, HIS FACE A MASK OF HATRED.

"I WANTED TO GET BEHIND YOU AND RUN A BLADE ACROSS YOUR NECK," JAMILA SAID. "IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SO EASY. WHAT HAPPENED TO MY MOTHER, THEN HAPPENS TO YOU - A LOVELY SORT OF SYMMETRY. A GIFT GIVEN, A GIFT RETURNED."

"YOU MAY AS WELL," THE MAN RASPED.

"SHE WOULDN'T WANT IT," JAMILA SAID, REACHING INTO HER POCKET. SHE PULLED OUT A THREAD, A BLOODY NEEDLE ATTACHED. "SHE WANTED ME AND MY SISTER TO BE AWAY FROM ALL THIS. MY FATHER, TOO. I THINK SHE HAD HOPE THAT THE FIGHTING WOULD END... THAT IT WAS A BATTLE THAT NEEDED TO BE FOUGHT AND WON, AND THEN WE MOVE ON. BUT EVEN YOU KNOW THAT'S NOT HOW THIS WORKS."

"THAT NEEDLE..." HE SAID. "THAT'S..."

"HERE'S WHERE WE ARE," JAMILA SAID. "YOU'RE BIG ON THE IDEA OF THE SOUL. YOU THINK YOUR BODY IS A VESSEL - AND MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT! BUT YOU *KNOW*, DON'T YOU? YOU HAVE NO DOUBT AT ALL. YOU DIE, AND YOU MOVE ON TO A WORLD OF SUPERNATURAL BLISS."

"YOU UNDERSTAND NOTHING."

"THAT'S SORT OF MY WHOLE PHILOSOPHY," JAMILA SAID. "IT'S PEOPLE WHO ARE SO SURE THEY *GET IT* THAT TURN THIS WORLD INTO HELL. I'M AT PEACE WITH NOT KNOWING. BUT I KNOW THAT YOU HAVE YOUR BELIEFS. AND ONE OF THOSE BELIEFS IS THAT IF I STITCH UP YOUR EARS, EYES, ASSHOLE, DICK, NOSE, AND MOUTH AFTER FILLING YOU WITH THAT BLACK TAR... YOUR SOUL IS TRAPPED IN THERE, TORTURED AND VIOLATED FOR ALL TIME."

SHE PRESSED THE NEEDLE AGAINST HIS LIP, AS HE STARED UP AT HER IN SILENT FEAR. SHE KNEW SHE HAD HIM.

"MY GIRLS ARE HELPING ME BUILD UP AN ARSENAL," JAMILA SAID. "I NEED A TEST RUN BEFORE I TAKE THIS SHOW TO AMERICA... BECAUSE LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING, DEVIL. I HAVE PLANS. WE'RE BUILDING A NEW WORLD. YOU CAN LEAVE BEHIND ALL THE HORROR YOU CAUSED AND BE THE FOUNDATION. YOU CAN HELP ME?"

"PLEASE," HE MANAGED. "DON'T... DON'T TURN ME..."

"IF YOU ANSWER THIS NEXT QUESTION TRUTHFULLY... AND GIVE ME SOME TOYS TO PLAY WITH FOR MY TEST RUN..." SHE SAID, PIERCING HIS LIP WITH THE NEEDLE. A TRICKLE OF BLOOD FLOWED DOWN HIS CHIN. "THEN I'LL SLIT YOUR THROAT LIKE I *REALLY* WANT TO. THEN, YOUR SOUL CAN GO ON AND DO WHATEVER THE FUCK YOU THINK IT DOES."

"ANYTHING," HE SAID.

"I LOVE A CHANGED TUNE," JAMILA SAID WITH A SMILE. "IT KEEPS THINGS FRESH. NOW TELL ME... WHERE DO YOUR *FRIENDS* GATHER?"

SOON AFTER THAT, FARIBA STOOD NEXT TO JAMILA, TAKING IN THE BLOODY SLIGHT OF THE MASSACRE AT THE TERRORIST CAMP WITH THE AIR OF A CHILD SEEING AN AIRPLANE IN THE SKY FOR THE FIRST TIME. SHE WAS ENTHUSED AND A LITTLE CONFUSED, BUT NOT ALARMED. JAMILA WONDERED HOW MUCH HORROR SHE HAD SEEN TO MAKE HER LIKE THIS. SHE KNEW THAT SOME OF THE WOMEN WHO JOINED HER CAUSE HAD BEEN THROUGH HELL AS BAD OR EVEN WORSE THAN JAMILA'S PAST, BUT THAT SOME MERELY BELIEVED IN HER IDEA.

"ARE YOU OKAY?" JAMILA ASKED.

"I AM," FARIBA SAID. "I... I KNOW THIS IS AN ODD THING TO ASK, IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL OF THIS..."

"WHAT?"





FARIBA LOOKED TOWARD HER WITH A SOFT SMILE, AN ODD SIGHT WITH A TRAIL OF RED BEHIND HER. "WHAT WAS IT THAT YOUR SISTER SAID TO YOU? YOU SAID YOU'D TELL ME IF WE MADE IT... AND, WELL. HERE WE ARE."

"HERE WE ARE, INDEED," JAMILA SAID. SHE CLOSED HER EYES, BREATHED IN AND SMILED. SOON, SHE AND THE OTHERS WOULD ATTEMPT TO SMUGGLE THE STITCHED INTO AMERICA AND BEGIN THEIR EXPANSION. THEY WERE STILL AT THE EARLY STAGES OF THE BIG PLAN, AND WOULD BE FOR YEARS TO COME, BUT THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THIS FIRST ATTACK THAT MADE JAMILA FEEL A SHIFT DEEP IN HER GUT. SHE ALWAYS KNEW THAT SHE'D MAKE A WAVE, ONCE SHE FIGURED OUT A PLAN, BUT TONIGHT, FOR THE FIRST TIME, SHE THOUGHT: *WE'RE GOING TO BE ABLE TO DO THIS. WE'RE GOING TO CHANGE THE WORLD.*

"SHE SAID..."

JAMILA GRABBED FARIBA'S HAND, MUCH AS SHE HAD HESTER'S SO MANY TIMES WHEN THEY WERE LITTLE GIRLS, AND SHE LOOKED TOWARD THE SKY. SHE COULDN'T HELP BUT SMILE THROUGH HER TEARS.

"I'M DIGGING A HOLE TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD."

THE END.

AND THE BEGINNING...

Stitched

TERROR

JONATAS GALLERY





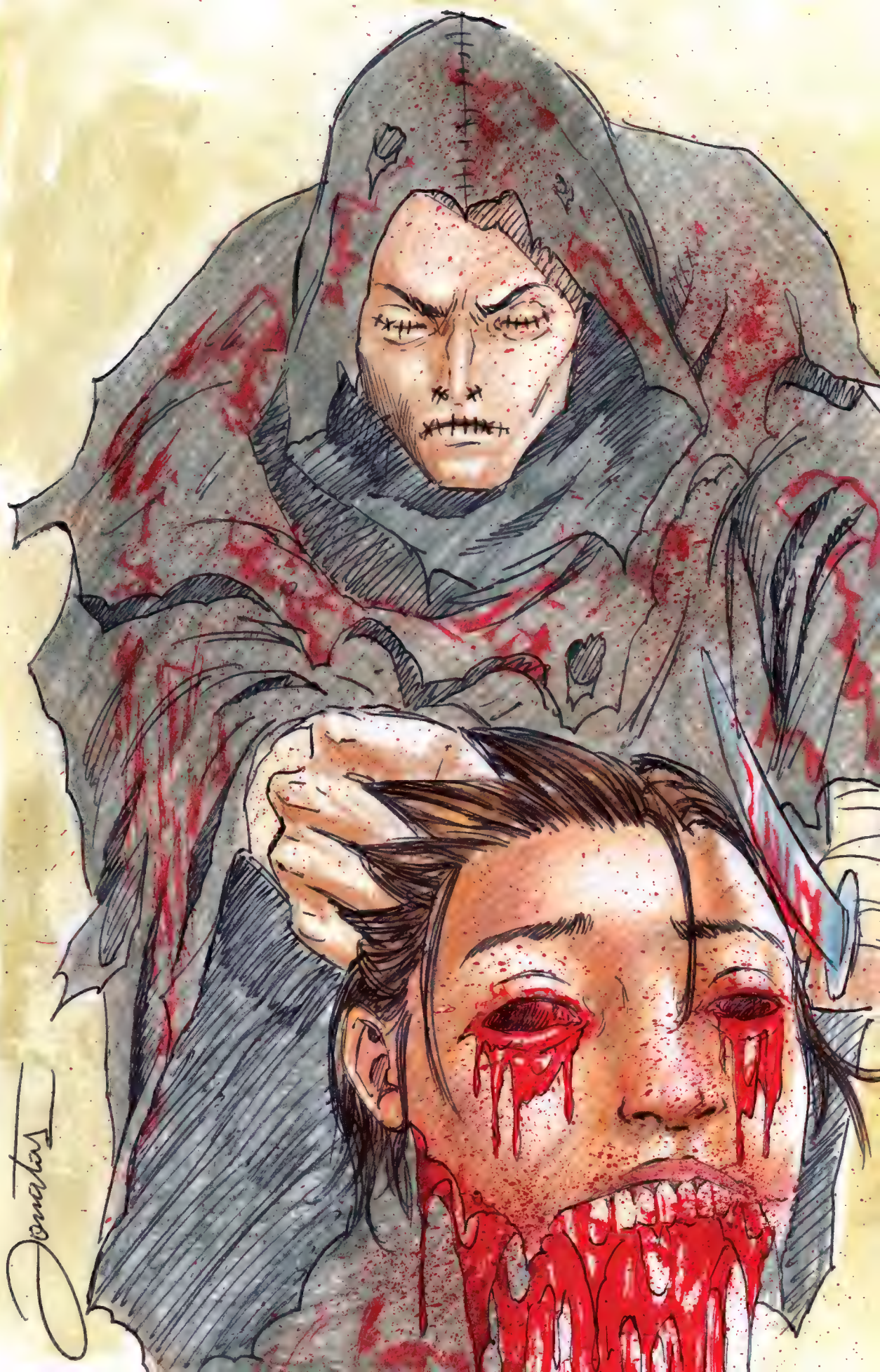






Sanata













MEPHISTO

